

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF THE EDUCATION QUALITY PROJECT'S POSITION PAPER: ON ACCOUNTABILITY

Every American family deserves access to at least one good school—a school that prepares students for college, a career, and active citizenship. Every American student deserves a good teacher—a teacher with the talent and commitment to ensure that each student learns, grows, and flourishes. This ‘good school promise’ is why accountability is so important. Accountability is the guarantee of quality that American students deserve; if they don’t have a good school or a good teacher, something should be done to fix the problem—and fast.

Despite a 20-year effort to enact policies that ensure access to good schools, school quality and educational outcomes remain profoundly inequitable. Shameful performance gaps remain between students of different backgrounds and schools in different communities. Worrisome new performance gaps have opened between America and other leading industrial countries. We recognize that accountability is not just a set of policies; it should be a data-driven culture within every school. We are fortunate to have a Secretary of Education who understands effective policy and effective schools. We are confident that he will end the dumbing-down of state standards, insist on accountability policies that measure the value that schools add, and create both a more nuanced and comprehensive system of school improvement.

The Education Equality Project is guided by five principles for reform:

- Educators should be measuring outcomes, not compliance.
- A good accountability system should monitor academic progress and performance—what schools contribute to students, not what students bring to schools.
- Accountability should entail consequences—sanctions or replacement for poor performance, and meaningful rewards for outstanding performance in closing the achievement gap. An effective accountability system will also provide ongoing feedback to advance achievement.
- American students deserve a set of rigorous national standards that realistically reflect the skills and knowledge they need to succeed in college and in their careers. To mean anything, these standards must be internationally benchmarked.
- A high-functioning accountability system should be transparent and user-friendly, collecting comparable data across schools on academic performance and attainment in core subjects. It should not be easy to evade or avoid.

The Education Equality Project’s recommendations for improving accountability and using it as a force to narrow the achievement gap are animated by five guiding principles. The overarching

goal of a strong accountability system is to ensure that all students graduate from high school prepared for a career or to enter college without requiring remediation. We propose five principles for achieving such a system:

1. EEP staunchly supports national college and career-ready standards aligned with high quality content and assessments.
2. EEP supports a reauthorization of NCLB that incorporates value-added assessment of student growth. The most serious consequences, including replacement, should be reserved for schools where students perform at low levels and fail to make progress.
3. EEP supports accountability focused on core subjects and monitoring graduation rates, advanced course taking, and college attendance.
4. EEP supports test-based accountability, including the adoption of online and adaptive assessments.
5. EEP supports the ten elements of the Data Quality Campaign (<http://www.dataqualitycampaign.org>) and the use of data to drive improvement and accountability with consequences.

The promise of good schools for all American students requires policies that take rapid action based on good data. As Secretary Duncan recently said, “It takes courage to expose our weaknesses in a truly transparent data system. It takes courage to admit our flaws and take steps to address them. It takes courage to always do the right thing by our children, but ultimately we all answer to the truth. You can dance around it for only so long. America’s children need your help.”